

# NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

## CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

### HEAVY USE AREA PROTECTION

(acre)

CODE 561

#### DEFINITION

The stabilization of areas frequently and intensively used by people, animals or vehicles by establishing vegetative cover, by surfacing with suitable materials, and/or by installing needed structures.

#### PURPOSES

This practice may be used as a part of a conservation management system to support one or more of the following purposes.

- Reduce soil erosion
- Improve water quantity and quality
- Improve air quality
- Improve aesthetics
- Improve livestock health

#### CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to urban, agricultural, recreational or other frequently and intensively used areas requiring treatment to address one or more resource concerns.

#### CRITERIA

##### **General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes**

All planned work shall comply with Federal, State, and local laws and regulations.

Safety of the users shall be incorporated into the design of the heavy use area protection.

**Design Load.** The design load will be based on the type of traffic, (vehicular, animal, or human) anticipated on the heavy use area. The minimum design load for areas that support vehicular traffic will be a wheel load of 4000 lbs.

**Foundation.** All site foundations shall be evaluated for soil moisture, permeability, texture and bearing strength in combination with the design load and anticipated frequency of use.

A base course of gravel, crushed stone, other suitable material and/or geotextile shall be provided on all sites with a need for increased load bearing strength, drainage, separation of material and soil reinforcement. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), National Engineering Handbook (NEH), Parts 642 and 643 (formerly, NEH, Section 20) and AASHTO M-288 (latest edition) provide guidance in quality specification and geotextile selection.

An impervious barrier shall be provided on sites with a porous foundation (high permeability rate), where there is a need to protect ground water from contamination.

Foundation preparation shall consist of removal and disposal of soil and other material that are not adequate to support the design loads.

**Surface treatment.** The surface treatment shall meet the following criteria:

**Bituminous Pavement.** The thickness of the pavement course, the kind and size of aggregate, the type of proportioning of bituminous materials, and the mixing and placing of these materials shall be in accordance with Department of Transportation criteria for the expected loading.

**Concrete.** The quality and thickness of concrete and the spacing and size of reinforcing steel shall be appropriate for the expected loading.

**Other Cementitious Materials.** Soil cement, roller compacted concrete, and coal combustion by-products (flue gas, desulfurization sludge, and fly ash) may be used as surface material if designed and installed to withstand the anticipated loads and surface abrasion.

**Aggregate.** A fine or coarse aggregate surface shall be a minimum 2-inches thick.

**Other.** Surfacing materials, such as cinders, tanbark, bark mulch, brick chips, shredded rubber, and/or sawdust, shall have a minimum layer thickness of 2 inches.

**Structures.** All structures shall be designed according to appropriate NRCS standards and specifications or Engineering Handbook recommendations.

**Sprays and artificial mulches.** When utilizing sprays of asphalt, oil, plastic, manufactured mulches, and similar materials, the manufacturer's recommendations for application shall be incorporated into the design.

**Drainage and erosion control.** Provisions shall be made for surface and subsurface drainage, as needed, and for disposal of runoff without causing erosion or water quality impairment. Provisions shall be made to exclude unpolluted run-on water from the treatment area. All treatment areas shall be shaped to prevent ponding of water.

**Vegetative Measures.** Liming, fertilizing, soil preparation, seeding, mulching, sodding, and vegetation management shall be according to the planned use and appropriate conservation practice standard in the local technical guide. If vegetation is not appropriate, other measures shall be used to accomplish the intended purpose.

#### **Additional Criteria for Areas Utilized by Livestock**

The treated area shall extend an appropriate distance from facilities such as portable hay rings, water troughs, feeding troughs, mineral boxes, and other facilities where livestock concentrations cause resource concerns.

NRCS conservation practice standards Critical Area Planting, Code 342; Fence, Code 382; Prescribed Grazing, Code 528; Filter Strip, Code 393; or Use Exclusion, Code 472 shall be used as companion practices, when needed, to meet the

intended purpose of the heavy use area protection.

Provisions shall be made to collect, store, utilize, and/or treat manure accumulations and contaminated runoff in accordance with NRCS conservation practice standards, Manure Transfer, Code 634; Waste Storage System, Code 313; and Waste Utilization, Code 633.

#### **Additional Criteria for Areas Utilized for Recreation**

The treated area shall be conducive to the overall recreation area and aesthetically blend with the general landscape and surroundings.

Plants, landscaping timbers, traffic control measures, wooden walkways, etc. shall be evaluated for effectiveness, aesthetics and accessibility as covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

When stabilizing heavily used areas consider adjoining land uses and the proximity to residences, utilities, cultural resource areas, wetlands or other environmentally sensitive areas, and areas of special scenic value.

For heavy use areas conducive to protection by vegetation, consideration must be given to the effect(s) of treading and/or miring. The vegetative species selected should tolerate and persist under heavy use conditions. If practicable, consider increasing the size of the area and/or establishing a rest/non-use period to allow plant recovery and increase vigor.

Heavy use area protection effects on the water budget, especially on volumes and rates of runoff, infiltration, and transpiration due to the installation of less pervious surfaces should be considered in the selection of surfacing materials.

The transport of sediments, nutrients, bacteria, organic matter from animal manures, oils and chemicals associated with vehicular traffic, and soluble and sediment-attached substances carried by runoff should be considered in selection of companion conservation practices.

If the purpose of the heavy use area protection is improvement of water quality, the heavy use area should be (re)located as far away from

the waterbody or watercourse as possible. Any work in and/or discharges near streams, wetlands or waterbodies may require a permit from the US Army Corps of Engineers, State water quality (permitting) authority, or local authority.

The size of heavy use areas utilized by livestock is dependent on the landowner's operation including type and number of animals, confinement periods, and/or the intended use. The size of treatment areas can range from 30 square feet per animal in partial-confinement, to 400 square feet per animal in total confinement, to 4000 or more square feet for animal exercise areas. Heavy use protection areas should be kept as small as practicable.

When surface treatments such as bark mulch, wood-fiber, or other non-durable materials are used for short-term livestock containment areas, consideration should be given to vegetation of the affected area with a cover crop.

For areas with aggregate surfaces that will be frequently scraped, consideration should be given to the use of concrete or cementitious materials to lessen the recurring cost of aggregate replacement.

## **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Plans and specifications for heavy use area protection shall be in keeping with this standard

and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose. Plans and specifications shall include construction plans, drawings, job sheets, or other similar documents. These documents shall specify the requirements for installing the practice, including the kind, amount, and quality of materials to be used.

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

An Operation and Maintenance (O&M) plan shall be prepared for and reviewed with the landowner or operator. The plan shall specify that the treated areas and associated practices are inspected annually and after significant storm events to identify repair and maintenance needs.

The O&M plan shall detail the level of repairs needed to maintain the effectiveness and useful life of the practice.

For livestock operations, the O&M plan for heavy use areas may be included as a part of the overall waste management plan. Periodic removal and management of manure accumulations will be addressed in the O&M plan.